

How to Make the New Pastor Feel Welcome

By Jane Dennis

By now, most pastors with new local-church assignments are pulling the moving van into town trying to get their bearings and bracing for the challenges of leading a new parish.

There's a house to transform into a home, new friends to make, schools and grocery stores to locate, new phone numbers and addresses to commit to memory, and untold numbers of unfamiliar faces to greet. And that's just the beginning.

This "resettlement" process – part of John Wesley's circuit rider legacy of serving where needed – can be traumatic and unpredictable, emotional and adventure-filled, all at once. It's a period of adjustment and transition that requires patience and understanding on the part of all involved, including the pastor, the pastor's family and the local congregation.

Spruce up the Parsonage

- Make sure the parsonage is clean and ready for the pastor and the pastor's family. Paint and make repairs well in advance of the pastor's arrival.
- Make sure that utilities – electricity, gas, water and phone – are not shut off. Unless necessary, don't change the parsonage phone number.
- Have the lawn mowed and neatly trimmed.

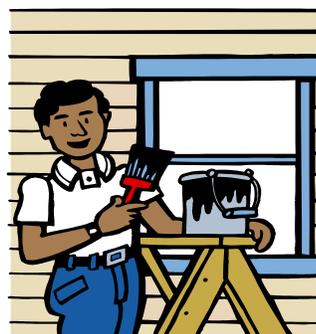
The Weeks Before the Pastor Arrives

Any welcoming events should be coordinated with your congregation's staff-parish relations committee, but here are some tips from some experienced laity and pastors.

* When the appointment is announced, correspond with the new parsonage family and welcome them to your church.

* Put together a packet of information about your community. This could be sent in advance or be waiting at the parsonage. The packet might include a city-county map, your church directory (preferably one with pictures), and information about doctors, dentists, schools, shopping areas, restaurants and utility companies.

* Consider giving the new pastor a gift certificate to a local grocery store or other shop. If you have a little lead time before the pastor moves to your area, send him or her a subscription to your local newspaper.



Doing the Town

► Plan a get-acquainted "driving tour" of the community, to show the pastor (and the family, if there is one) local businesses, schools and landmarks. Introductions to community leaders may be appropriate at this time. A city map with homes of church members indicated may also be helpful.

► Make the transition easier for "preacher's kids" by inviting the children home to socialize with your children or grandchildren.

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Help With the ‘Name Game’

- ◇ Be patient with the pastor (and the parsonage family) when it comes to learning and remembering names. Remember, you only have to learn as few as one or two new names, while your new pastor and family have many names and faces to put together.
- ◇ Introduce yourself, and for the first several meetings repeat your name each time. Association is a good memory tool.
- ◇ It may also be helpful to assign someone as a “human cue card” to stand near the pastor at the first few Sunday services and church events to share names, family and business connections, and special concerns.
- ◇ Offer to host or help organize informal time to meet and visit with church members, preferably in small groups or neighborhood “clusters.” Urge members of the congregation to share their joys and concerns with the new pastor.
- ◇ If your church doesn’t already have complete records, consider compiling a card file of members to serve as a “who’s who” reference guide and resource of information. On 3-by-5 index cards (or a computer), list names, addresses, phone numbers, children and other family relationships. Note dates for transfer of membership, baptism, marriage and birthdays.

Could the Pastor Use a Good Pounding?

* Plan a church wide event – perhaps a reception, potluck dinner, ice cream social or old-fashioned “pounding” (where members bring a pound of sugar, flour or other staples to stock the new pastor’s pantry) to welcome and introduce your new pastor to the congregation. Invite other church and community leaders.



*The *United Methodist Book of Worship* contains a service for welcoming a new pastor to a congregation.

*In all that’s to be done to welcome the new pastor, don’t forget the pastor’s spouse and other family members. Welcome and include them in as many activities as possible. However, don’t place too many expectations on the family, and don’t treat spouses and children as unpaid employees. Remember, it’s the *pastor* who’s under appointment.

Be Open, Kind, Fair and Patient

- ⌘ Let the new pastor set his or her own pace. Don’t expect the pastor to be at dozens of places and events in the first few days on the job.
- ⌘ Avoid making comparisons between the new pastor and former pastors. Never say, “Rev. So-and-So would never have done it that way,” or “We’ve never done it like that here.” Respect the new pastor’s individuality.
- ⌘ Be open to new ideas and new ways of doing things. Come to church with a receptive heart and an open mind.
- ⌘ Be aware of the rules of pastoral etiquette. Do not invite former pastors to return to conduct funerals or weddings – those are now the pastoral responsibilities of the new pastor. It is appropriate, however, to invite a former pastor back as a guest at a wedding or to be present at a funeral.
- ⌘ The administrative board or council may wish to prepare a written “state of the church” report for the new pastor. Tell about the plans made at the beginning of the year and where the church stands in completing those plans and programs. Include a list of immediate needs and anticipated needs for the remainder of the year.

Be ‘Front and Center’ on Moving Day

- √ Assign church members to greet and welcome the new pastor and family as they arrive at the parsonage. If the pastor is single, invite single members to be a part of the welcoming group.
- √ When selecting greeters, ask a few physically hardy souls who can help unload the moving van.
- √ Once the unloading is complete, only stay around and help with unpacking boxes if invited. Many people prefer to unpack boxes and handle their personal belongings themselves. Allow the pastor and family to do their own “settling in.” Offer to return in a few days to carry away the boxes.
- √ If possible, ask a few members to bring a casserole or a bucket of take-out chicken to the parsonage for the first few days. It’s often more convenient to “eat in” rather than stopping the moving-in process and getting ready to “eat out.” Make it even easier by delivering food in disposable containers.

Welcome